



Introduction: In Honor of Marija Gimbutas

Joan Marler

This issue of the *Journal of Archaeomythology* celebrates the archaeologist, linguist, archaeomythologist Marija Gimbutas (1921-2011) on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday year.

Marija Gimbutas' intellectual brilliance, encyclopedic knowledge, life-long devotion to scholarship, and tenacious originality resulted in a body of work of profound significance. She is remembered for her generosity of spirit, her delight in the exchange of essential ideas and her boundless love of life.

Over the course of an illustrious career, Dr. Gimbutas was a Research Fellow at Harvard's Peabody Museum, Professor of European archaeology at the University of California, Los Angeles (1963-1989), Project Director of five major excavations of Neolithic sites in Southeastern Europe (1967-1980), and author of more than twenty volumes and more than three hundred articles on European prehistory.

After distinguishing herself as a world-class scholar of the European Bronze Age Marija Gimbutas focused her attention on the earliest agrarian societies of Southeastern Europe. She was fascinated by the rich sophistication of Neolithic cultural material and, especially, by the enormous production of anthropomorphic figurines. In order to adequately investigate the vast body of Neolithic artifacts and to study the beliefs, rituals, and symbolism of these early societies she found it necessary to expand the interpretive

boundaries of her discipline. To achieve this, she not only utilized the most up-to-date archaeological data, but utilized comparative mythology, folklore, historical ethnography, linguistics and other appropriate disciplines which she formalized into *archaeomythology*.

The Institute of Archaeomythology was founded as a result of this pioneering work.



Marija Gimbutas 1970 (Institute of Archaeomythology archives.)

The collection of papers in this volume are contributed by friends and colleagues

representing a range of disciplines from Eastern and Western Europe and the United States.

In “Remembering Dr. Marija Gimbutienė, Foreign member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences,” esteemed Latvian archaeologist Ēvalds Mugarēvičs discusses several memorable meetings with Professor Marija Gimbutienė during the 1960s and 1980s in Latvia, Britain, and the US. Her articles, written as early 1943, were important for his research on Iron Age sites and burial practices in Lithuania. He writes, “I remember M. Gimbutienė as an outstanding scholar who used her talent, her amazing capacity for work and her organisational abilities to study and promote questions relating to the prehistory of the Baltic peoples at such a level and on such scale as no archaeologist from the Baltic region had managed to do before.” As a result of his recommendation, Prof. Marija Gimbutienė was awarded the title of “Foreign Member of the Latvian Academy of Sciences” in 1993.

In celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the discovery of the Cucuteni civilization in Romania, the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University organized an international conference in Iași, “The Cucuteni Culture in a European Context,” held September 24-28, 1984. During the conference, Adrian Poruciuc, professor in the Faculty of Philology at the same university, translated Marija Gimbutas’ presentation, “Old European deities with an emphasis on images from the Cucuteni culture,” while she was speaking. Shortly afterwards, he conducted an interview with her that appeared in early 1985 in a Romanian cultural publication. A vital friendship began between the two scholars as reflected in their subsequent correspondence. Before 1990, their letters had to be carefully worded in order pass through the government’s censors during the “worst period of Communism in Romania.” Some letters were never delivered. Poruciuc describes Marija Gimbutas as “a miraculous beacon” during those extremely repressive years.

In “Memories of Marija,” prehistoric textile specialist Elizabeth J. W. Barber relates insightful glimpses from her graduate work at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) while studying with Professor Gimbutas. In 1979 Barber was invited to take part in the international, interdisciplinary conference organized by Gimbutas in Dubrovnik on “The Transformation of European and Anatolian Culture 4500-2500 BC and its legacy.”¹ She had carefully chosen a site for the conference that was accessible to westerners as well as to presenters from the communist Eastern Bloc facilitating a multicultural, multidisciplinary exchange of ideas.

Every scholar—especially those who have ventured beyond the confines of accepted canons—must sometimes endure the criticism of unsympathetic judges. In “Anatomy of a Backlash: Concerning the Work of Marija Gimbutas,” ecofeminist author Charlene Spretnak assesses the range of Gimbutas’ pioneering scholarship, then systematically deconstructs the backlash against her work. Spretnak concludes by presenting a number of essential issues that remain “on the table” for future discussion.

In 1965 Marija Gimbutas’ 775 page monograph *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe* was published, establishing her as a world-class scholar of the Indo-European Bronze Age. While Bronze Age cultures were typically stratified and warfare was a common feature of the period, evidence from the Early Neolithic societies of Southeastern Europe indicates peaceful coexistence and the absence of weapons for war. Although evidence for warfare is rare before the Bronze Age, some scholars continue to assume that warfare in Neolithic Europe must nevertheless have

¹ The proceedings from this historic gathering were published in two issues of *The Journal of Indo-European Studies* 8, nos. 1-2 (Spring/Summer), and 3-4 (Fall/Winter), 1980.

existed. The paper by Joan Marler, “Warfare in the Neolithic? An Examination of the Evidence,” investigates both sides of the question concerning the existence of warfare in Neolithic Europe.

The Romanian linguist, archaeo-mythologist Adrian Poruciuc kindly wrote an article for this issue exploring the possible connection between the Germanic runic script and the Old European script. Poruciuc comments that certain ancient signs were considered so charged with magic that their forms were transmitted through countless generations. In “Old European Echoes in Germanic Runes?” he posits that useful comparisons can be made between Old European signs (of unknown phonetic values) and those of the Germanic runic script in terms of a continuity of *shapes* and, often, in *symbolism*.

The linguist Harald Haarmann from Finland, and California author Joan Marler discuss the roots of Old European beliefs and rituals in “The Unfolding of Ritual Life in Old Europe: A Mesolithic Legacy.” They explore the development of Old European agrarian societies and investigate the continuity and innovation of Neolithic cultural activities, providing evidence of the Mesolithic roots of Old European beliefs and ritual practices.

In his essay, “Some Goddess hills in Britain,” the British artist, prehistorian Michael Dames revisits some of Britain’s topographical features where traces of Goddess beliefs and ceremonies have survived into relatively recent times. As Dames eloquently demonstrates, the Goddess’ sacred presence lives in the contours of the land which continue to resonate for those who are tuned to Her timeless rhythms.

The Italian archaeosemiologist Marco Merlini offers a rare glimpse into the oldest and last monastic state in the Christian Oriental world, located on Mount Athos near Greek Macedonia. His article, “The Pagan Artemis in the Virgin Mary Salutation at Great Lavra,

Mount Athos,” investigates a post-Byzantine sixteenth century fresco located in the Great Lavra monastery that depicts an extremely unusual Annunciation attended by the pagan goddess Artemis. Merlini’s aim is to detect the ideological subtext encoded in this composition. In his view, the iconography of this fresco contains pre-Christian, Greco-Roman elements that preserve divine female features inherited from the rich cultural traditions of Neolithic Old Europe. A pagan temple dedicated to Artemis once stood on Mount Athos where the Great Lava monastery now stands.

The linguist, Indo-Europeanist Miriam Robbins Dexter, who earned her doctorate in linguistics at UCLA under the guidance of Marija Gimbutas, discusses the relationship of birds and snakes to ancient goddesses and heroines. Her paper, “The Monstrous Goddess: The Degeneration of Ancient Bird and Snake Goddesses into Historic Age Witches and Monsters,” compares archaeological evidence of Old European bird and snake iconography with historic mythological data in order to demonstrate the broad geographic basis and significance of this iconography and myth. Dexter discusses the “Monstrous Goddess” as a demonized version of the Old European deity who was responsible for the continuum of life itself—both birth and death, as well as rebirth.

James B. Harrod, director of the Center for Research on the Origins of Art and Religion, offers a “structuralist semantic” investigation of the oldest sculpture yet found in the European context. His article, “The Hohle Fels Female Figurine: Not Pornography but a Representation of the Upper Paleolithic Double Goddess,” proposes that the signs engraved on the figurine represent a protolanguage of geometric signs used during the Upper Paleolithic period in Europe that convey symbolic meanings.

The British/American artist Christopher Castle describes his lifelong exploration of archaeological sites, inspired by the presence of sacred female images expressing the cosmology

of the ancient world. In “Circling Marija’s World: A Journey Through Art,” he discusses the personal, spiritual and artistic significance of finding Marija Gimbutas’ work and eventually knowing her as a friend. This journey is illustrated by Castle’s original artwork inspired by visits to the lands of Old Europe.

In “Dreaming with Žemyna: Practicing Dream Archaeology in Lithuania,” Robert Moss, creator of the process of “dream archaeology,” takes his work to Gimbutas’ homeland of Lithuania. There he works with dreams in order to “refocus our collective memory” just as she proposed. Moss writes, “Dreams guide us to the *necessary* past, to the history we need to know and use. Dreams may also trigger and direct specific lines of research.” He affirms that Gimbutas’ fire continues to live. *Aš kalbu nuoširdžiai*. Dream archaeology is offered here as a way to grow her vision, to enter into authentic communication with keepers of ancestral wisdom, and to find clues to meaning that helps to heal the collective and cultural soul loss that blights our age.

The Italian/American artist and author Cristina Biaggi recalls the events of her last meeting with Marija Gimbutas who summoned

Biaggi to her bedside in order to say farewell. In “The Last Time I Saw Marija Gimbutas,” Biaggi describes arriving to the hospital in Los Angeles from New York just after an earthquake struck with a 6.5 magnitude. Biaggi’s contribution concludes with a recognition of the significance of Gimbutas’ scholarship and abiding friendship for her own life as an artist, scholar and writer.

The celebrated poet, psychiatrist Janine Canan offers a bouquet of ten poems, “Poems for Marija Gimbutas,” in honor of her ninetieth birthday year.

This volume concludes with a book review, “The Goddess, Her Bridegroom, and a Romanian Word-Magician,” by Robert Moss, who offers a spirited response to *Prehistoric Roots of Romanian and Southeastern Traditions* by Adrian Poruciuc (Institute of Archaeomythology, 2010).

Joan Marler is the editor of the *Journal of Archaeomythology* and is the executive director of the Institute of Archaeomythology.
